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Interview with Lionel “Lal” Lemieux by Don Nicoll and Brian O’Doherty

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Lemieux, Lionel “Lal”

Interviewer

Nicoll, Don

O’Doherty, Brian

Date

October 8, 1999

Place

Lewiston, Maine

ID Number

MOH 155

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Biographical Note

Lionel A. “Lal” Lemieux was born in Augusta, Maine on January 23, 1911 to Quebecois immigrant parents. He was the tenth of twelve children, the first of two to graduate from high school, and the only one to attend college. He graduated from Cony High School in 1928 and from Bates College in 1933, majoring in history and government. He also debated under Brooks Quimby, and was a senior when Ed Muskie was a freshman. He began his career at Western Union, and worked throughout New England. In 1940, he took a position with the Lewiston Evening Journal, and covered the municipal governments of Lewiston and Auburn. From 1945 to 1956, he covered the Maine State House. In 1954, he became city editor of the Lewiston Evening Journal, and eventually became editorial editor. At the time of interview, he lived in Lewiston.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: Bates College; Maine Legislature 1946-1949; 1952-1954 Maine Democratic Party; 1954 Maine gubernatorial campaign; Burt Cross’ campaign mistakes; polio known as blue fever; difficulty for Francos in Augusta public schools; father was Justice of the Peace: *a notaire*; *Snoop Cat*: Bates College publication; Brooks Quimby; Edna Confort;

Irving Isaacson; Fernand Despins; Lewiston Charters; Council components; Lewiston/Auburn media, Evening Journal and Le Messenger; atmosphere among State House reporters; Sun and Journal rivalries; Democrats could caucus in a telephone booth; Republican Party in Maine; Governor's Council; 1951 Liquor Probe; impressions of Muskie; evolution of news business; Frank Hoy; and WLAM radio station.

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Transcript

Don Nicoll: Now, what we'd like to do is to first get your history, background, experiences, and then in the course of that we can talk about your recollections of Ed Muskie and -

Lionel Lemieux: I'm going to turn this on here, that, we both have hearing aids. There, that way I hear better. You don't have to raise your voice, okay?

DN: We will be looking for your story, really. And we're not just looking for items about Ed Muskie directly, but about the environment in which he got his education at Bates and in which he was active politically and in government. And from you, Lal, it will be particularly important for us to get your recollections and impressions of the people who were involved in the news business in the '40s and '50s, because, as you observed, there aren't many of us around now; Pete Damborg's gone, Ed Penley's gone, Bill Langzettel.

LL: Lal Lemieux.

DN: Oh, no, Lal is very much with us. And so we'll, I'll ask short questions and you can talk as long as you want. We usually

LL: This will kill you.

DN: I think she's going to enjoy it. We'll set an outside limit of around two hours and if it appears that there's more to talk about, we'll arrange another date to come back. By the time an hour and a half to two hours has gone by people are a bit tired and it's time to take a break. And I will start out simply by identifying the location and

LL: Are we on now or not?

DN: No, no. And we'll have a few formalities to start the tape, and then I'll ask you to identify yourself, spell your name, give us your date of birth, etcetera. And just a note on what we do. The tapes are transcribed and then we edit them, and we edit them only to correct the typist's work (*break in taping*) by putting things on tape.

LL: Okay. You'll tell me if I, if my answers are too long. I don't intend to be loquacious.

DN: Oh well, we'd love to have you loquacious. We are on the 8th day of October, 1999, at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Lionel A. Lemieux, 259 Central Avenue in Lewiston, Maine. With us are Mr. and Mrs. Lemieux, Brian O'Doherty, a student at Bates College, and the interviewer Don Nicoll. Lal, would you start out by giving us your full name, date of birth and the names of your parents?

LL: Yes, my name is Lionel Albert Lemieux, and I was born January 23rd, 1911. My parents were Henry I. Lemieux and Delina Dutill Lemieux, both of Augusta.

DN: Now were your parents born in Maine or had they come here from Canada?

LL: They were both born in Canada and my grandfather's family came to Augusta, well came to Skowhegan first and then to Augusta. And then, I guess that answers that.

DN: Did they come from Quebec or the New Brunswick area?

LL: Quebec.

DN: And what brought them to Maine?

LL: The farms were getting more and more difficult because of the money problems were great. And so they came to, when my grandfather came to Skowhegan, it was to work in the silk mill there. And when my father moved on through to Augusta, it was for the cotton mill.

DN: And your father worked in the cotton mill?

LL: Actually he didn't, my older brothers worked in the cotton mill. My father worked in a grocery store. In fact, he owned a grocery store for a period of time with a partner. And everything went fine until the partner took the savings and ran off with them, and my father was left with the bills.

DN: Oh my.

LL: So that made it a very, very difficult time, but that was long before I was born.

DN: Is that right?

LL: You see, I was one of twelve children, I was the tenth, so by the time that I was born the family was well established. My father no longer owned the grocery store, he worked for another store.

DN: But he stayed in the grocery business.

LL: Yes, and he was one of the first people of French extraction to be in the government of Augusta.

DN: Oh, what was, what did he, was he a member of the city council?

LL: He was a member of the common council, and when Ernest McLean was gover- mayor of Augusta, he and my father worked very well together. And Ernest McLean was a Bates graduate and he was the one who persuaded me to come to Bates in 1929.

DN: Now you graduated from high school in 1928?

LL: That's right. I stayed out a year in order to get some money to go to college, and the

scholarship was a, I was offered scholarships from Bates, Colby, U of M and Bowdoin, and I was very tempted to go to the University of Maine. But then after Mr. McLean said that he would contribute to my first term bill, I decided that I'd choose Bates, which I did and of course, and I had scholarships every year. Otherwise I could never have made it because it, my, we were a poor family. I was the only one up to that time who had ever gone beyond grammar school.

DN: Now, did other, did your other siblings, your younger siblings go beyond grammar school?

LL: Yes, my brother Laurence graduated from Cony, Cony High School, and my youngest brother, Wilfred, we will call Chum, went for two years. And then he decided, I was in college at the time, he decided that he would quit school and work for my, the older brother Emile, who had a garage in Augusta. And Chum never went back to school after that.

DN: He stayed in the garage business?

LL: He stayed in the garage. When my older brother Emile died, Chum took over the garage and he kept that until Emile's son came back from the service and took over. And then Chum decided that he would go into something else.

DN: Now you, your interest in pursuing education beyond high school had started before in 1928 and '29. I take it from your record that you were a good student.

LL: Yes, I was an honor student all four years, and I was particularly successful in public speaking and debate, chiefly because I had very good teachers.

DN: What was Cony like in those days?

LL: Well, I was one of the two-legged dogs, the French kids, and to compete I had to really fight. Well, fortunately I liked to fight and made out all right. And the, most of the teachers were very good, and good to me, and I, with the students, I got along with them. They knew that I wouldn't take things and pass them up. If they wanted to fight, I'd give them a fight.

DN: Now was this a general problem with the Anglo students in the school, or was it a small group?

LL: Well, there were very few of French extraction in the public schools at that time. They, and I went to a parochial school until the age of nine, when I had what was later called polio. In my day they called it the blue fever. And then, now I've forgotten your question.

DN: The question is were the prejudices that you ran into general or confined to a small group?

LL: Oh yes, then I went to Smith School, a public school. I was the first member of my family to go to a public school. We had all gone to the private French parochial school.

DN: By the way, was this on Sand Hill?

LL: Yes, yeah. But I didn't live on Sand Hill, my grandfather did. I lived on Laurel Street, which was the second street toward town from the foot of Sand Hill.

DN: But on the west side of the river.

LL: Yeah, on the, yeah, the west side. My father was a notary public, wait a minute, I'm sorry, a justice of the peace. In French they called it a *notaire*, that's why I got mixed up for a moment. And having served on the common council, I think that's how he got that appointment and continued to be a justice of the peace. And incoming immigrants from Canada would come to my home for my father to sign their papers and so forth, and they were always very polite to my family. I can remember as a boy having grown men and women, the men tipped their hats to me because I was the son of the *notaire*. And we, my father didn't encourage that, but that's the way it went.

DN: Within the French community, you were part of a very respected family, but when you moved outside the French community, you ran into difficulties?

LL: Yes, some difficulties. Not too bad, I survived.

DN: Now, you were an honor student but you didn't have money, and 1929 was not a very promising year to go on for college. What did you do for the year between high school and college?

LL: Well, while at Cony, I believe it was my junior year, I was given an opportunity to go to Ralway, New Jersey and become a simplex operator for Western Union. A simplex was what is now called, well, there's another name for it now and I can't remember it. But I decided that I wouldn't go there because I'd have to drop out of school. And so I stayed in Augusta, completed my high school work at Cony, and when the first group of operators got back, I taught operators the routine of the office business, and they taught me the work on the simplex. I was a touch typist and that was a big help right from the start.

DN: Now had you taken typewriting in high school?

LL: Yes, I took two years of typewriting, and I was a pretty good typist. I could type a hundred and twenty five words a minute.

DN: I'd say that's very good.

LL: Well, so did the teacher. But, excuse me, I've got to have some water.

DN: you want to pause-

LL: That's why I didn't, that's why I stayed out a year, took a post graduate course and took some, see, I had taken commercial courses mostly, and so I took some academic courses so that when I came to Bates I didn't have to take the exams; I was accepted.

DN: You could come straight in.

LL: Yes.

DN: So you had spent that year between high school and going to college working for Western Union and -

LL: Yes, yes, I was already an operator by that time. That was, my senior year I was a regular operator.

DN: Now the company must have thought well of your high school education and your knowledge of business practices if they had you teaching operators how to manage the business.

LL: Well, I don't know if they ever knew about it. We were working under a manager, William Beauchesne of Augusta, and he was a very exacting man and a very good, he was a key man, he was a Morse code man. And how I got into Western was that my mother took care of his mother on her deathbed, and he promised my mother that if any of her sons wanted to be, to have a job in Western Union, which in those days was considered a very good job, that he would teach her sons. So I was the sacrificial goat and oh, how I hated it. I was down there, and he was demanding; he was very, very fussy. And I'd go home at night and I'd cry in my, before I was going to sleep because I hated it so much. Well it was, gradually I got to realize what it meant, that I could go to college because every college town had a Western Union office, and I could work nights and go to college days. And so then I got to liking Bill Beauchesne better. And I did plan on coming here to Lewiston, and when I came to Lewiston, I went into the Lewiston office and I worked there all through my college days. And one of my classmates, Vincent Belleau, who was later the city editor of the *Lewiston Journal*, then wanted to have a job. And I got him a job with Western Union and I taught him the work here in the Lewiston office. And, but his great love was newspaper work and so he didn't stay with it. But he went to Bates and he was in my class, but he didn't get his diploma at the time because of a slight scandal that took place our senior year. Did you ever hear of the *Snoop Cat*?

DN: No.

LL: Well, the *Snoop Cat* was a publication. Vin Belleau and a group of others decided that it was time to tell all about members of the faculty, and the bald eagle. And let's see, I can't remember his real name now but one of the professors who was of course bald, and his wife was pregnant, and it said "the bald eagle is about to be father of an eaglet." And his wife was going around town this big, so there was no question about it. But somehow the management at Bates didn't like the idea and Vin was one of those who was kicked out right, a week before graduation. So -

DN: Because of a story they published?

LL: Yeah, I tried to protect him. He told me about the project; I told him it's a mistake, you're going to get in trouble. "Oh, he says, you're too fussy." "Well," I says, "all right." Then the day that the *Snoop Cat* was published, I was then living off campus on College Street, and the

truck that brought the papers left all of the copies on my bureau in my room for me to call the others at Bates to come and get them. So the first call I made was to Vin Belleau, and I said, "Vin, I've just looked at the *Snoop Cat*." Well, he said, "Isn't it terrific?" I says, "You're crazy." I says, "That is going to get you in more trouble than you can handle. Now look, they're all on my bureau right now, we have a furnace here, I can put them in the furnace and destroy them in five minutes, and I've never seen them, you've never seen them." "Oh no, no," he said, "leave them, leave them," he says. "They're going to be picked up right away and everything's going to work out all right." He says, "You worry too much." I says, "All right, just remember, I offered." So two of the Bates students came down and got the paper, I gave them all the papers except two. I kept two and I had them for years. And they came up on the campus and as soon as they got around, oh boy, did it blow up. There was, Clive Knowles was one of those who was in on that, and I don't remember the others now. And they were promptly called before the faculty and they were kicked out of college. Now fifteen years later, the college advised Vin Belleau that he could have his diploma, and he said, "Keep it." He refused to go on campus to get it.

DN: By then he was editor of the paper?

LL: He was city editor, yeah. He was, we were the same age. Oddly, we had been playmates when his father was, who was a lawyer, his father was clerk of the house, the Maine House of Representatives when the Democrats were in control way back in the early 1900s.

DN: This would have been when Frank Coffin's grandfather was speaker of the house.

LL: Very likely, yes.

DN: Nineteen eleven, about then?

LL: Yeah, the year I was born. That was a good year.

DN: But so, Vin's father was a lawyer, but his father didn't do anything when Bates tossed his son out?

LL: He couldn't, he was dead.

DN: Oh.

LL: He died in New York City long before Vin was in college. In fact, I think, if I remember correctly, Vin was still in grammar school when his father died. But Vin's grandfather was also a lawyer, and he was the clerk of the, clerk for the judge of probate for a long, long time. But Vin didn't want to be a lawyer, and he was all newspaperman. As a kid he had a little newspaper on his street that he put together, and that's why he wasn't interested in going into law.

DN: Now, speaking of childhood friends, when you were at Cony High School you knew Burton Cross, was he a classmate?

LL: No, no, he was ten years older than I. No, I, Burt Cross and Roy Hussey were friends of my brother Emile who had the garage, and I heard of them, I knew, because they were grown men and I was a kid. It was not until years later, when I was a newspaperman and they got into politics, that I had close contacts with them. Before that the contacts were all through my brother, my brother Emile. When you have nine brothers, you have to search for the names, sometimes.

DN: Now when you went to Bates, you'd been out of school for a year. What was it like coming back into the classroom?

LL: Well, it didn't phase me. I knew I was headed for it, and I was anxious to be there, and so it didn't bother me to get back in the harness, as one might say. And of course I had the carry over of my Western Union work from Lewiston, from Augusta to Lewiston, and so I didn't have any difficulty in that respect.

DN: Was the climate any different from your high school experience in terms of attitudes of people toward you, given your French background?

LL: Yes, it was more liberal. But Cony had become more liberal, too, by that time. And I don't recall any particular difficulty at Bates because I was French and spoke French. And of course I always considered myself an American of French extraction, and I still do for that matter. And I've always liked my French background, but I'm much more, I'm impressed with what my children have accomplished as Americans. Then if their French had been that good, they would have stayed in France.

DN: What did you major in at Bates?

LL: I majored in history and government, and economics came in there. Oh yes, in those days you could have two majors if you had the rank, and I had the rank. I was in the top decile of my class at Bates and, let's see, government and history, economics, that's it. Government and history was my major, economics and sociology my major and related minor, economics and sociology. I carried both of them. I was one of those peculiar people who like to study, and I did a great deal of studying.

DN: Were many of your classmates and colleagues in college avid students, or were many of them there for a good time?

LL: Well, my classmates, my roommates in college were by and large interested in getting an education. One of my classmates and roommates was a man by the name of Donald McEwan Smith from Methuen, Massachusetts. His family, he came from a rich family, and he was a dyed in the wool Socialist and he did a great deal of evangelizing for the Socialist Party, and he graduated in the class of '34 instead of '33. And about two years ago, wasn't it that he came, just about two years ago he stopped in here all of a sudden. I hadn't heard from him in years, he was a little fellow, six-foot-four. And my other roommate that year in West Parker

Hall was from Aroostook County. And he was six-foot-six. And I have a picture somewhere in my files that, where Don is here, and my other roommate, whose name escapes me at the moment, is standing there. And they've got their arms like this, and I'm hanging on to their arms like a monkey, you know. That picture was a famous one.

DN: I can imagine.

LL: And the other fellow lived in Lewiston for a while after graduation, married a Lewiston girl. But now I think he lives in Sanford, and for some reason I can't remember his name right now.

DN: Now did you have the same roommates several years running, or just that first year?

LL: No, just that year, and then I decided to live off campus.

DN: Was that less expensive?

LL: Yes, yeah. And I got a room on College Street, and my roommate there was a rabbi's son from Laconia, New Hampshire, Izzy, not Shapiro, a real nice chap. He introduced me to the ways of the Jewish people, and I even attended Beth Abraham services in Auburn with him.

DN: Now was that the synagogue in New Auburn?

LL: Let's see, yes, yup, yeah because Beth Israel was in Lewiston and the other was in New Auburn. I had a skullcap for years. I don't have it any more.

DN: Now the, in your studies at Bates, it appears that it was a much more conservative society than Bates today, obviously. If students who married were tossed out, if free speech in the *Snoop Cat* was not tolerated, did you feel under pressure to conform?

LL: Well, I was not exactly a conformist. The, I was careful when not conforming, and I tried to use judgment in going into situations such as the *Snoop Cat*. I refused to have anything to do with it as I said before, and I'm glad I did because I was never called before the student council. Not student council, I mean the professors and all them, their meeting there. I can't think of it now. But-

DN: The academic council?

LL: No, they, the professors had regular meetings and I can't remember what that was called, but I was never called before them. Although I came close once, I think it was at the time of the *Snoop Cat* because I was close to Vin, and so they figured I must be one of the people, but I honestly had had nothing to do with it. It was, after it was all done there, and I had an opportunity to destroy it, and I would have done it. And Vin said, "No," and so I didn't do it. He regretted that for a long time.

DN: Did, what sort of discussions took place among students about what was going on in the

world around them, either the local economic conditions, or the national Depression, or developments in the world?

LL: That's a hard one. I know that we recognized that things were going on. I remember the rise of Hitler was being discussed on campus, and I can't remember many details.

DN: Do you think it was something that was regarded as, or not even regarded, but treated as background but not front and center as you went through your college studies?

LL: Well, I really can't answer that question. I'm not sure, I don't remember anything being ignored. And I know we had a League of Nation meetings, like a sample of the League of Nations, in Chase Hall, and some of those things that you mention were discussed.

DN: These were formal discussions?

LL: Yes, with the professors. Usually the history professors were the ones who put those things together. And being a government major and history, I was in on that. But I spent a lot of time on my debating work with Brooks Quimby.

DN: What was it like as a debater in those days?

LL: Well, he was very demanding, and I can understand why. It made us more careful, it made us work hard to achieve what he wanted, which was success. And the fact that I was of French extraction didn't matter to him, but I do remember in the freshman prize debates, my freshman year, I was one of the speakers, and there were three judges. One judge was Edna Conforth, a teacher in Auburn whom I didn't know. I didn't know any of the judges. When the debate was over, I was adjudged best speaker by two out of three of the judges. The third judge who voted against me was Edna Confort, and she had been sitting one row ahead of Mr. and Mrs. Ernest McLean of Augusta during the debate. And at the end of the debate she said to her companion there, and that was overheard by the McLeans, she said, "That French kid really did the best job but I'm not going to vote for a French kid." And they turned around and told me about it, see. But I ran into her a few times through the years in Lewiston-Auburn, and only once that I told her, I says, "I've known you a long time." I says, "You don't vote for French kids." Oh boy, I thought she was going to faint. She's dead now.

DN: What, you mentioned that Brooks Quimby was teaching you, coaching you for success. Do you remember, other than the discipline of preparation, any of the things that he emphasized in, as qualities that you should develop in debate?

LL: Preparation, preparation, preparation, that was about the size of it. I had an unusual experience my senior year. I was returning to the campus from, I had a job in a lunchroom here, and I got hit by a car. And the next thing I knew I was in St. Mary's hospital and I was pretty badly injured. The worst thing that happened to me is that when I came to a day or so, a day or two later, I had absolutely no recollection of debating and of a debating speech which I had practiced that afternoon. And it was the one for our trip for the Eastern Intercollegiate Debating Championship, and there was Frank Murray, Ted Seamon and I, and we had been working on

this with Brooks Quimby. And when I got out of the hospital I took my paper and it was all strange to me. I had to learn all over again, because when the car struck me, it struck me in the back, threw me in the air, and I landed on the back of my head, I still have a flat spot up there. And that's, yeah, I know, that's the trouble. And for a few days there there was a question of whether Quimby would have me go on the debating tour, because, whether I'd be well enough. Well my doctor claimed that I would be, that things were all right, and then I went over and we practiced. And anyway it worked out that we made the trip and we won the championship. And that's how my picture with the other two wound up in the Muskie Archives.

DN: As a result of that victory.

LL: Yeah, the flat part doesn't go with it.

DN: Who were some of the other faculty members that you particularly remember?

LL: Dr. Hovey was a professor of government, and he was a strange one. He would stand there silent, then he'd say two or three things, and then he'd be silent again. And he figured that you didn't have to remember all the dates and all these things in history, as long as you realized that Columbus discovered America before Washington came in and things like that, you know. Not necessarily just those, but to get the general outline of history was the important thing, and I enjoyed working with him. Then another, my professor of, Dr. Hovey was professor of history, and professor of government. Oh boy, I knew him so well. He became a member of the Lewiston school board when I was covering the Lewiston beat, and then he was elected to the legislature when I was covering the legislature. And he was too old for the job, and he was terrible. And I used to be so embarrassed because, "Oh, that's your Bates professor?" "That's right, that's right," I couldn't deny it, it was true. But I think that he was trying to do things that were just too much for him. Funny I can't think of his name now.

DN: Was that Pa Gould?

LL: Pa Gould, that's right, yeah. You probably remember some of the things he did in Augusta.

DN: No, I don't actually.

LL: Well, he'd get all befuddled, he'd start arguing something and then vote for it. He'd start arguing against it and then vote for it. And it was too bad, but he was too old. I'm older than that now, that's why I keep forgetting different things here.

DN: You're almost as good a forgetter as I am. The -

LL: How old are you, Don?

DN: Seventy-two.

LL: Oh boy, I remember when we were kids. I figured you were somewhere in your seventies.

DN: Yeah. The years at Bates overlapped very little, one year I guess, with Ed Muskie as a student there.

LL: Yes.

DN: Do you remember him at all from the Bates days?

LL: I think I remember his being on the debating council and meeting with him but never, we never had any real contacts, just a hi and so forth.

DN: Had you known Irving Isaacson during that period?

LL: Yes, I knew Irving, he was local. And I never had much to do with him. No, nothing against that, just that after I went to work for the *Journal*, I did work with his family, the family of lawyers, and I saw Irving a few times. He married a girl from the Hungarian underground, and I met her at one time, but I don't even remember her name now.

DN: Now after Bates you went on to work for Western Union as I recall.

LL: Throughout Bates I went to work for Western Union.

DN: And what happened after you graduated?

LL: I continued with Western Union. See, I had started as a messenger boy in Augusta. Then I became a clerk, then an operator, and then when I came to Lewiston I was an operator. I had an advantage in that I could do the Morse code and also the new machines, the what are now called the teletypes, that didn't come out before, and the simplex machines. And so I had more chance of jobs in different offices. I worked in fifty offices in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and Massachusetts over a period of fifteen years. And some offices I was only there for a week. And one assignment, to St. Johnsbury, Vermont, I never even got there when the assignment was canceled. I got as far as a little place called Woodsville, New Hampshire, which is right on the Vermont border, on the other side of the Ammanusik River, and, (*pause*) one of those lapses that comes up once in a while. Yeah, that's right, I was on, they had train service then and Western Union people had special passes. And I was on the way to St. John, or St. J they used to call it, and I got to Woodsville and the telegraph operator that . . .

End of Side A, Tape One
Side B, Tape One

DN: Okay, you were telling us, Lal, about your assignment to St. Johnsbury, Vermont.

LL: Yes. Well in Woodsville, New Hampshire the railroad telegraph operator came onto the train and called out my name, and I identified myself and he said, "I've got a wire for you from the Boston office," so he gave me the wire. The wire said, "Cancel St. J appointment; stay in Woodsville. Take over from the manager there." At that time I was a traveling manager, and so I took my things, all I had was a suitcase, and got off the train and went in, and the manager was

in the office. He expected to be replaced and he, he was nice to me, he knew I had nothing to do with it. So I took over that office and I was there for eight or nine months instead, of one week in St. J, eight or nine months there.

DN: A lot of the time with Western Union you were moved from office to office.

LL: Yes, yeah. I had a permanent assignment to Berlin, New Hampshire. That was just after, my wife, who was trained as a schoolteacher, but didn't have a job, was traveling with me on a lot of these assignments. And when I was assigned to Berlin as a, the permanent office, she and I decided, well, we're going to be able to actually have a home now, so we got married. And we got to Berlin, the manager had retired because his wife was very sick and he had to stay home to take care of her. Well, two weeks later she died, and he wanted his job back. Well, he had more seniority than I did, so if I refused to be bumped it would mean that he'd have to jump around, and the company could assign me to any job, anywhere, and I couldn't refuse. So I told my wife, I said, "Look, we'll make out. We'll take a bump, and I'll wind up somewhere." Well, I wound up back in Lewiston. And then the Skowhegan, Maine office opened up, and I bid for it, and because of my seniority, I got it just like that. And I was there for, oh, I don't know, six, seven years, I guess. I could figure that out exactly but it, and it was, when I left Western Union, it was to, to come here for the newspaper.

DN: What led you to go to work for the newspaper?

LL: Well, the Western Union job was getting very difficult money wise. The Somerset Shoe Company was about to close up and that was the principal customer for Western Union in Skowhegan. And no amount of development work that I did could replace that big account. Consequently, money was very tight, and I figured I ought to get into something that was a little more alive for the help. And I had been in contact with Vin Belleau right through the years; we'd always corresponded. They didn't have e-mail in those days. And I talked with him; he told me he had an opening for a reporter. Well, I says, what do I want to be a reporter for, I says, I'm not a reporter. Well, I had been a re-, I had reported for the *Old Boston Transcript* while in college, and was, my debating work was something that really prepared me for newspaper work because it was about the same thing.

So I decided to quit Western Union and come here to go to work for the *Journal*. About three days after I came to Lewiston, I used to stop in the Western Union office on the way home every day, I'd been with them so long, you know. I went into the Western Union office here in Lewiston and the district commercial manager from Boston was visiting. And he was a Princeton graduate, and I had defeated, well I didn't do it alone, but I had been on the winning team against the Princeton debate team, and he knew about that. And we talked back and forth and he says, "Why did you quit Western Union?" And I told him about what I've just told you. And I said, "I wanted a permanent office and I was sick and tired of jumping around from one place." "Well," he says, "you know," he says, "I had you in mind for Woonsocket, Rhode Island." And he says, "There's a lot of French there and they need someone who can handle both French and English." And that was one reason that I was hired to cover the Lewiston beat, because I spoke both French and English. If you didn't speak French and you go into City Hall, you might as well stay home, they wouldn't even talk to you. So, I told the district commercial manager, I says,

“You know, two months ago if you had told me that, I would have said, ‘Hooray, I’m going.’ Today I’d say thank you very much, but I’m not with Western Union any more. I don’t say I’ll never come back, but I will say that I’m going to give my new career a real good try before I give up.” And I only stayed with the *Journal* forty-two years.

DN: What year was it that you went to work for them?

LL: For the Lewiston *Journal*? Nineteen forty [1940], two days before my birthday.

DN: And you were, so you were there for the next forty-two years.

LL: Nineteen eighty-two.

DN: What, and your initial assignment was covering City Hall?

LL: Lewiston City Hall and city government.

DN: Why did Vin decide that you should have that beat? Was that simply because it was open, or because he thought you’d be particularly knowledgeable?

LL: Oh, it was open. He knew that I was not too happy with the Western Union as things were going, and he figured that I could handle the job. And so that’s why I came, I came to Lewiston. And it was one of the oddities, you know, in Augusta I was one of the French kids, in the minority. In Lewiston, the minute I walked in City Hall, Lemieux, I was one of the majority and it felt so odd, you know, to be accepted as a person in the majority after having been on the other side of the fence.

DN: Who was mayor in 1940?

LL: They had one. Wait a minute, a Bates graduate of all things. It was Fernand Despins, D-E-S-P-I-N-S, and he was the first mayor under the new charter. The new charter was adopted in 1939, in June I think it was, and when I came in 1940 he was in the last days of his first term. He was a lawyer. And because I was from Bates and he was from Bates, I had an immediate contact there, which worked out very well. And-

DN: Was the new charter adopted in ‘39 essentially the same charter that’s in place now?

LL: Yes, yes, there have been changes but it’s essentially the same thing.

DN: And was the makeup of the council essentially what it was, not individuals, but generally through your career?

LL: Well, sir, in ‘39 they all seemed old, and now they all seem young. You know, after all I haven’t stood still, I’ve gotten older too.

DN: What were some of the issues in the 1940s that you were covering?

LL: Oh boy. No, I don't remember. We're getting a little too far back.

DN: Okay, we're coming up on the post war period, '46 on. During that time were you covering just the Lewiston city government, or were you starting to cover the State House as well?

LL: Forty-six, let's see. I was covering the Lewiston city government, and then by '46 I had covered Auburn and county government. And when the legislature was in session I was covering the Democrats, all three of them. And Sam Connor was the expert on the Republican party in Maine for the *Journal*, and I was his understudy. And if I remember correctly now, Sam died in 1945 and I took over as a, by that time someone else was covering the Lewiston beat, and I was wholly on the state beat then. And I stayed -

DN: So from '45, '46 you were really state beat news reporter.

LL: Yes, I covered the state beat for sixteen years, and part of that time I was also covering, when the legislature was not in session, the, I was covering the courts and the county government. But it's hard to remember the exact years there.

DN: In those days...

LL: Let's see, Vin died in 1953, no, '54, my brother Louis died in '53, and Vin died six months later. And the following month, that was in, he died in August of '54 and September of '54 I became city editor of the *Journal*.

DN: So you succeeded Vin.

LL: Yes. And then in 1955, January, the legislature met and I had one of my top reporters take over the desk and I took Ed Schlick, you probably remember Ed, Ed Schlick to the legislature to introduce him around and get his feet placed to take my place covering the legislature, which he did. And I came back and I stayed on the desk, let's see, I think it was seven years. And then the next step was covering, let's see, the editor of the editorial page and editorial writer, and I did that until I retired in 1982. Yeah, that about covers it.

DN: Now, when you were covering the State House and the political beat, in Lewiston the, as I recall, the news agencies if you will, you had *le Messenger* still, and you had some reporting on COU and WLAM started up after the war, and the two papers, the *Sun* and the *Journal*, both owned by the Costellos. Was there much competition from your point of view between these different news media?

LL: Well, the *Messenger* was entirely French, and that was very strong in the French community, and Lewiston had a big French community. I was acquainted with the *Messenger* because my father was a subscriber, one of those in Augusta. When I was a kid I read the *Messenger* in French. And then, oh shoot, I went off on a tangent there and now I can't (*unintelligible word*).

DN: Louis-Philippe Gagne, was Louis-Philippe Gagne the editor or a columnist for them?

LL: I can't recall his, he was a columnist, and I think he was editor of *Messenger*. The name of the owner and editor.

DN: Didn't Faust own, Faust Couture?

LL: Faust, yes, Faust Couture, that's right. And Faust offered me a job at one time, I thanked him, I said no, I said I'm sticking with the *Journal*. And I didn't, I have never cottoned to the idea of going back and being French and living in the past. I think the future is the best thing, take care of the present, the future will take care of itself. You can quote me on that.

DN: You will be. When you were covering politics at the state level, do you, what was it like in Augusta with, first with the reporters who were there, and the small group of State House reporters?

LL: I think we always got along well. I think Lorin Arnold used to resent me at times because several of the chief clerks, and so forth, and the officers had been in Cony High School with me, and so I could pick up information. He'd go into an office and not, there's nothing going on, and he'd leave. I'd go in, and I'd be chatting and then, "Oh yes, oh by the way, did you know," and I'd pick up information that led me to good stories, and Lorin didn't like it. But we learned to get along together. I always tried to get along with the others, I wasn't interested in criticism of their efforts, and as long as they treated me all right, I treated them okay.

DN: Was there much competition between the *Journal* and the *Sun* in those days?

LL: Yes, mostly on the local level. The *Sun* never had a political writer. I guess I didn't mention being political writer, but that came with the state coverage. And the *Sun* never had a separate person, and the *Journal*, because of Sam Connor who held that job for fifty years, that's why the *Journal* established their particular position.

DN: What was the climate like in Augusta in that '46 to '50s period?

LL: It was cold in the wintertime. Forty-five, forty-six, nothing stands out in my memory. Frankly, I don't remember the particular things being discussed each session. You know, after the session was over, then you prepare for the next session and a whole lot of new problems, and then that goes by and then there's the next session. And so the only way I could, I would recall would be to go back in the record and see what I wrote at that time and what memories that would evoke.

DN: Now there weren't many Democrats around in the '40s in the legislature.

LL: No, no. They used to say that Jean Charles Boucher of Lewiston was in the senate, and he would have a Democratic caucus in a telephone booth. It wasn't true but we used to kid him about it. And the Democrats in the house were not numerous either. When Ed Muskie became a floor leader he had a very small group, but because of what I've always felt was a very unusual

quality of his to get people to agree about things, he was very successful even though he only had a small following of fellow Democrats.

DN: Were you aware, actively aware of Ed when he arrived in the legislature in '46, '47 it would have been?

LL: I think I met him, I knew that he was a Bates grad, and so as soon as he came in I, when the new legislature met I made it a point to get acquainted with all the new members, both parties. And I would keep my, oh, not my menu, but my booklet there and go through and see, "Oh, who's that one? That's that one there in the house, okay." Then I'd make a point to contact that person and get acquainted. And then as time went on and things would come up, they'd remember me.

DN: And it was that personal contact that enabled you to dig out stories.

LL: Yes, that's right, yeah, and it worked out very well. I only recall one instance in which a legislator tried to take unfair advantage of me. It was a little old man from Brewer, Maine and he was chairman of one of the committees, I don't recall the details of it now. And he gave me a statement and I used it in a story, then he denied having given me a statement and said I'd made it up. Well, I was on the spot. But fortunately I had a good enough reputation so when I told the powers that be that he had given me that, and I had written it on his say so, they accepted my statement. And after that I never used his name again. If I mentioned his committee, I'd say, "and the chairman." I never used his name, and it used to burn him up but, too bad. If he'd complain at times, I'd say, "Look, you told me you never spoke to me, I don't know who you are." That went on for a while and then I suppose I should have forgiven him, but it's hard to forgive when somebody cheats you.

DN: What -

LL: You notice I did not give you his name.

DN: Yes.

LL: He's already dead anyway.

DN: In those, in that period of the '40s there were very few Democrats. What was the nature of the Republican Party?

LL: I don't quite understand what you mean.

DN: Well, this was the era of [Sumner] Sewall, and Hussey, and [Burton] Cross, and [Fred] Payne, and [Margaret Chase] Smith, and Brewster, and -

LL: [Ralph Owen] Brewster was before them.

DN: He was still there until '48, wasn't it, that the -

LL: Not in Augusta, he was a national.

DN: National figure, but they were affecting the party in Maine and, what were your impressions of the Republican Party during that period?

LL: Well of course it was the majority party, and it was strong, and they did as they darn pleased. At times I thought they were riding roughshod on the Democrats unnecessarily, but they had the votes, so who's to complain?

DN: Did you cover the governor's council very much in those days?

LL: Yes, yeah, see, one thing flashes in my mind now. Oh gee, it was on a, I can remember the seed of it, but I can't seem to recall all of the things that, it was a time when there was a probe. Oh, the 1950 liquor probe, and, let's see, 1950, Burt Cross probably was the governor at the time, I'm not positive of that.

DN: That would have been '52, '53.

LL: Fifty-two, fifty-three?

DN: No, Payne was the governor when they had the liquor probe, that was '51.

LL: That's right, that's right. Well, they had this big report from a man from Waterville and, a lawyer in Waterville, the thing was probably two inches thick. And the governor called a meeting of the council and, for the newspapermen, and he says, "Now," he says, "I want you to know that you're getting your first crack at this report." And so they distributed the report on it. Then we all got it and put in on the, "Now," he says, "do you have any questions?" I said, "Questions?" The heck, how are you going to ask questions about a report that thick that you just got? So he turned like this and I thought he was turning toward me. So I put up my hand and I said, "Governor," I says, "I don't have a question, but I do have an observation." I says, "We newspaper men are extremely smart people. We're very, very clever in every way, but when you give me a report this thick and say, 'Do you have any questions about it' and I haven't even opened the cover," I says, "you got me beat." Of course everybody roared, you know. So the governor said, "Well," he says, "I guess it is, well" he says, "next week's council meeting you can, any of you who have questions you can always ask at that time." But after the meeting, he got at me, he said, "Look, why did you say that?" I says, "Why did you ask that question, 'do you have any questions?'" I said, "That was ridiculous. I didn't say that, I didn't say you said a ridiculous, I just said we didn't have any questions." That was one of my big days.

DN: Did you cover the liquor scandal hearings?

LL: Yes, yes, oh I wrote a lot about those.

DN: And was that one of the early times that you observed Frank Coffin, or had you known him before?

LL: No, I had known Frank Coffin in Lewiston, I knew his mother, (*unintelligible word*) Bates. And when Frank was chairman of the Democratic state committee, excuse me, that was the year that Ed Muskie ran for governor, and I had a lot of contacts at that time. But I don't recall that, I don't recall his involvement in the liquor scandal.

DN: He represented Fred Payne in that scandal.

LL: Well, I'll be darned, I don't remember that.

DN: In fact, I think the first time I ever saw Frank was when he appeared before the committee and was holding a hearing in the house chamber. And Frank's first words to the legislative committee were, "This is a case of very sour grapes," which is a typical Frank remark. But that was a period of intense partisan debate within the Republican Party, and then in 1954, as you noted, Ed Muskie ran for governor, and you had some skepticism about the Democrats being able to pull it off.

LL: Yes, I had a lot of skepticism. I figured that Frank and Ed had done a terrific job of rebuilding the party. I didn't feel that they had the strength to get the votes, and I said so. And I, in a speech to the local Kiwanis Club I said what I had used in my column, I had a weekly Maine politics column. I said what I had used in my column that previous Saturday, that Frank and Ed succeeded in working up a storm of Democratic activity, but it's only a storm that will pass away with the election, the votes will go the other way. Well, boy oh boy, was I reminded of that often.

DN: Was covering the State House very different after that election?

LL: You mean after Ed took office? Well, it was for me because even though we had been friends for years, I no longer had the open house feeling at the Blaine House. And of course by that time, see that was just after Vin died and I became city editor, so that I wasn't in Augusta. And to try to keep in contact there and do my work here, it was just impossible. But I knew that the Blaine House, using that for the people there, was not happy with me and the fact that I had said they wouldn't win. And I said, "Well, that's the way it goes," you know, I'd call it as I saw it. I was honest about it and I was wrong, okay, so I made a mistake. Somewhere along the line, I missed something.

DN: When, as you observed the, and perhaps as you think back about that period, what do you think were the reasons for Ed Muskie being able to win that race in 1954?

LL: Boy that's a rough question. I can't pick out any particular thing that I recall. I know that Burt Cross was convinced that he was going to be reelected, and there was some trouble in eastern Maine, which he could have handled, but he didn't because it wasn't worth it. He didn't need the votes. And after the election we hashed, he and I hashed that over, but that could have been the deciding factor. And now, all these years later, I don't recall exactly what it was, but I know it was in eastern Maine, quite sure it was Washington County, and it had a major effect on his reelection. The fact that he was not reelected, well boy, that hit him hard.

DN: Did he talk about it with you, or was this -?

LL: Yes, after the thing was over we, and I'll admit I had a terrible thought when he was telling me about the, how the thing was over and he had lost, he couldn't see, nothing he could do about it, and a thought came to me. "Now see if I had accepted your offer of a job in your closing days, I says, I wouldn't have a job anyway, would?". And the next minute, oh, no, I mustn't say that, and I didn't say it. Some years later when we were talking I told him, well, he says, "I'm glad you didn't say it at the time," he says, "I felt terrible." I said, "I know you did," and I said, "that's why, the chief reason why I didn't say it, because I didn't want to make it worse."

DN: Did he, when he talked to you about the election and his loss, did he talk much about what he thought were the reasons for losing?

LL: I don't remember really. I don't, I don't remember that, no, he didn't have anything against Ed Muskie. I don't recall his ever saying anything unfavorable about the man, and, no, I don't remember the exact, he did feel that he had slipped up on that Washington county situation, which he felt probably tipped the scales the other way. He was the first Republican governor to be denied a second term, and boy, that hurt.

DN: In the course of your reporting, and particularly your political reporting, you had a chance to observe some major figures in Maine politics; Ed Muskie, Frank Coffin, and Senator Smith and Governor Cross and all. What -

LL: Would you care for a ginger ale, or?

DN: I'm fine, thanks.

LL: Just plain water for me, but would you like some coffee or tea? We don't serve liquor.

Mrs. Lemieux: Not in the morning.

LL: We can't have it any more so we don't serve it.

DN: How are we on time, maybe, let's pause right now.

BO: Approximately eight minutes.

LL: What did you say, there's about eight minutes left? It's 10:38.

DN: What, Senator Smith, Ed Muskie are towering figures on the national scene. What was it that made them so noted and so successful in a sense?

LL: Well

DN: From your point of view. You were covering them.

LL: I would, the only thing I can figure would be that, the personal contact I had with them over the years, that they were always honest with me, and if they couldn't tell me something they'd say so, and I never held that against anybody. But I don't know anything beyond that that I recall.

DN: You were also a reporter at a time, and an editor, during a period when the news business was changing dramatically, and, how from your perspective did the reporting change from say 1946 when you went to work for the *Journal*

LL: Nineteen forty.

DN: Forty, oh excuse me, yes, 1940 when you went to the *Journal* until 19-, well, '72 roughly, when -

LL: That was ten years before I retired.

DN: Yeah, in that period what were the major changes that you observed, and how did it affect the news business?

LL: Oh boy, well of course the development of TV was a major one. TV news became a real competitor to the newspaper news.

DN: Now you were at the *Journal* when Frank Hoy broke with the paper.

LL: That's right, I set out to mention that earlier when you mentioned Frank Hoy. He was the general manager when I was hired then when he decided to establish WLAM. L.B. Costello, who was a Bates man by the way, L.B. was active then as owner of the paper and chief executive officer, and he was very anti-radio, very, very strongly. And Frank thought that the coming thing was a combination of radio and newspaper, and so he went ahead and got the thing all set up for WLAM. Then, this part was told me, I did not hear it from L.B. or from Frank, he went to L.B. and said, "Here, I've made the arrangement, I've got the license, I've got this, I've got that. The *Sun Journal* and WLAM can combine and be the strongest news element in central Maine." And L.B. said, "Now Frank, I told you I was against having a radio in here. I told you that this newspaper would not combine with radio, but you went ahead anyway." "Yes," he says, "now I'm offering it to you a done deed." "Well Frank," he says, "you may have a done deed, but you are out of a job. You are fired." And so Frank left. Then Frank offered me a job as a, on WLAM, and he offered one to, oh shoot, the next two that I was going to mention accepted, I just -

DN: Ralph Skinner?

LL: Ralph Skinner, yeah, I was thinking of Ralph. And there was a, there were three from our, from the *Sun - Journal*, our paper, that went with him. Oh yes, Romeo Sansoucy who was in the advertising department. And they stayed with WLAM for a long time, but I couldn't see it and I'm glad I didn't leave, because I stayed with the paper and made out all right. Frank wound up

in bankruptcy.

DN: The, was Judd Higgins the third person? Had Judd Higgins been at the -?

LL: No, Judd had left the paper before WLAM came up. He went into some, Farmington was it?

DN: Ultimately he and Denny Chute went to Farmington.

LL: Yeah, that's what I was trying to remember.

DN: The, now in Lewiston, Lewiston has always been a major factor in the, let's see, we're almost at the end of this tape, we've only got a few seconds left.

LL: What, you have them.

DN: On the tape. Let's stop now rather than starting another question, and let's see-

End of Interview